

Northern Bruce Peninsula Official Plan Update 2017 Topic Papers

Prepared by the Bruce County Planning and Development Department

Topic 5: Natural Heritage Systems

The Provincial Policy Statement (2014) requires Municipalities to protect natural features and areas for the long term, and also now requires:

Natural heritage systems shall be identified in Ecoregions 6E & 7E1, recognizing that natural heritage systems will vary in size and form in settlement areas, rural areas, and prime agricultural areas.

Natural heritage system: means a system made up of natural heritage features and areas, and linkages intended to provide connectivity (at the regional or site level) and support natural processes which are necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species, and ecosystems. These systems can include natural heritage features and areas, federal and provincial parks and conservation reserves, other natural heritage features, lands that have been restored or have the potential to be restored to a natural state, areas that support hydrologic functions, and working landscapes that enable ecological functions to continue. The Province has a recommended approach for identifying natural heritage systems, but municipal approaches that achieve or exceed the same objective may also be used.

What we do right now

In Settlement Areas:

- The Niagara Escarpment Plan functions similarly to a Natural Heritage System in terms of core areas, linkage areas, and large tracts of protected lands in the eastern part of the Tobermory Settlement area, and north and east of Lion's Head. This system extends along the eastern shoreline and escarpment lands of the Municipality.
- The "Natural Areas" policy identifies important features, such as the Tobermory Bog, St. Edmund's Cave ANSI system, and core deer yards; and also includes natural hazards.

Also:

- County Forests, MNRF, Federal, and lands owned by other conservation organizations protect large areas
- The Bruce County Tree Conservation By-law regulates commercial harvest in woodlots greater than 1 ha
- The County Official Plan limits fragmentation of the countryside by limiting lot creation
- Environmental Impact Study Requirements in / adjacent to various natural heritage features (woodlands, wetlands, ANSIs, fish habitat, rattlesnake habitat) generally yield detailed site-specific protections for features on new lots

Possible considerations for Official Plan

- Develop separate, but complementary policies for Natural Hazards, which present a risk to life and property, from Natural Heritage features. Many natural hazard areas may include natural heritage features, but some do not. Other areas that have natural heritage features do not present hazards to life and property. Areas could be identified as both a Natural Hazard and part of a Natural Heritage system. The Municipality's "Pilot Project Steering Committee" has developed criteria for mapping Environmental Hazards which are currently being mapped in detail throughout the Municipality for consideration in the updated Official Plan and Zoning By-law
- Most development tends to be located close to existing roadways. Describing areas closer to roads as 'linkages' and areas further away as 'cores' may be a worthwhile consideration.
- Encourage the progressive rehabilitation of extractive industrial activities within the Tobermory settlement area to restore or improve natural heritage system functions

Other tools

- Could consider tree-cutting by-laws / site alteration by-laws or Development Permit system as mechanisms for maintaining tree cover